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For Immediate Release**FCC OPENS INQUIRY TO EXPLORE USING FCC PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CONNECTIVITY NEEDS OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORS*****Seeks Comment on Ways to Protect Privacy of Survivors' Calls and Texts to Hotlines and Emergency Help Resources***

WASHINGTON, July 14, 2022—The Federal Communications Commission today opened an inquiry to evaluate how FCC programs might help survivors of domestic violence and other harmful abuse get access to connectivity services. The Notice of Inquiry seeks comment on whether the Lifeline and Affordable Connectivity Programs can be modified to support the connectivity needs of survivors. Specifically, the inquiry seeks comment on whether survivors are currently able to fully utilize these programs and to gain a better understanding of whether and how these programs might be modified to support survivors, while continuing to protect the programs against waste, fraud, and abuse. The Commission also explores ways to keep calls to hotlines and shelters from appearing on call logs, due to the potential for abusers to exploit this information.

Domestic violence is a significant public health and safety issue, harming and upending the lives of more than 12 million people every year. Survivors often face severe financial hardship when attempting to establish independence from an abuser. In cases where an abuser may have control over a family phone or broadband plan, a survivor may lose access to vital tools needed to help them connect with family, social safety networks, employers and support services.

The Notice of Inquiry begins a process to evaluate ways in which the Commission can assist survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, or stalking. The Commission seeks comment on how to confirm a person's status as a survivor and how individuals might also be able to demonstrate financial hardship or other qualifications necessary to participate in the programs. The Notice also explores how to address survivors' hesitancy to seek support due to the potential for abusers to easily gain access to outbound and inbound calls and text messages between survivors and hotlines and shelters.

To address that issue, the Notice seeks comment on enabling service providers to omit records of such communications from customer-facing call and text logs and proposes other ideas such as the feasibility of creating a database of survivor hotlines and other pertinent telephone numbers. While outlining several potential paths to enable survivors to gain access to vital services, the Commission welcomes the expertise of the community that supports survivors for additional ideas and methods.

Action by the Commission July 14, 2022 by Notice of Inquiry (FCC 22-56). Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington approving. Chairwoman Rosenworcel and Commissioner Starks issuing separate statements.

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).